

2013

## Chapter Three

Ruby Troup

*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

© The Author

---

Downloaded from

<http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/3098>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).



© Ruby Lynn Troup 2013

All Rights Reserved

## CHAPTER THREE

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

RUBY LYNN TROUP

Master of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013

Director: HEATH MATYSEK-SNYDER

Associate Professor, Department of Craft/Material Studies, School of the Arts

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
May 2013

## Acknowledgement

The first person that I would like to acknowledge is William Hammersley. Had I not met Bill, I would have not come to Virginia and I would have traveled a vastly different path. I feel incredibly honored to have been one of his last graduate students and I wish him all the best in his retirement. I would also like to thank Heath Matysek-Snyder, his energy is at a mind-blowing level and I know that Team Wood has been passed into deserving hands. To the remaining members of my committee, Susan Iverson and Andrea K Connell, I owe them both many thanks for their grace and wisdom. Also...Jack Wax... I would like to acknowledge my beautiful studio mates, Nikki Farrand in particular, because she is amazing and she tells great cat stories. I need to say thank you to Lauren Miller, Sohail Abdul Malik Abdullah, Rena Wood, the rest of my graduating class and all of my peers...they are all Rock Stars. Further more, I need to acknowledge my family and would like to publicly state their greatness. My mother and two sisters, Sarah and Tansy, I can truly say that words can not express all of the reasons why they are so dear to me but I will sum it up by saying -they just don't make them any better then these three lady's.

## Table of Contents

|                       | Page |
|-----------------------|------|
| Acknowledgements..... | iii  |
| List of Figures ..... | v    |
| Abstract.....         | vi   |
| Preface.....          | 1    |
| Chapter One.....      | 8    |
| Chapter Two.....      | 13   |
| Chapter Three.....    | 19   |
| Curriculum Vitae..... | 27   |

## List of Figures

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Figure 1: Detail of <i>Re-Piecing Tansy Mae</i> .....               | 1    |
| Figure 2: Detail of <i>Love birds</i> .....                         | 8    |
| Figure 3: Detail of <i>Comfort blanket</i> .....                    | 9    |
| Figure 4: Detail of <i>Squirrel coffin studies for Oliver</i> ..... | 10   |
| Figure 5: Detail of <i>January at the Harrison</i> .....            | 11   |
| Figure 6: Detail of <i>More than Corn</i> .....                     | 13   |
| Figure 7: Side one of <i>Backyard</i> .....                         | 15   |
| Figure 8: Side two of <i>Backyard</i> .....                         | 15   |
| Figure 9: <i>Her Cloak</i> .....                                    | 16   |
| Figure 10: Detail of <i>Her Cloak</i> .....                         | 17   |
| Figure 11: <i>Find the Story</i> .....                              | 18   |
| Figure 12: Detail of <i>Find the Story</i> .....                    | 18   |
| Figure 13-15: <i>Chapter Three</i> .....                            | 21   |
| Figure 16-19: <i>Chapter Three</i> .....                            | 22   |

## Abstract

### **CHAPTER THREE**

By Ruby Troup, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013

Major Director: HEATH MATYSEK-SNYDER

Associate Professor, Department of Craft/Material Studies, School of the Arts

Where does the story begin and what are the different chapters? What forest is she traveling through and where does she store her baggage? Where are the doors that she needs to open and why must this path, follow her like a shadow? What does she shelter and what does she let sit out in the rain? What does she allow to fracture and will a wall be broken? Is she searching for something that can be found and did she leave enough breadcrumbs to find her way back?

## Preface

My work is an embodiment of the stories, and memories from childhood. It comes from my need to unpack these things, rediscover them and put them in place. It involves prying open doors and finding what could be inside. It's an acceptance and an honoring of the narrative that makes me who I am.



*I was born at home in a small house in Southern Indiana, on Mel Curry road. There was a pond outback and a garden to the side. It was the end of September, which meant that the weather had shifted to the cool of the fall season. Around me at the beginning were my mother, my father, my two older sisters, a large barn-cat and a seriously scruffy dog.*

*I have no real memories of this place, but I now understand that the difficulties surrounding our situation was something we carried with us when we later moved to our house on Shiloh Road. This is where my true memories begin.*

*It is a quick flash, only that of a brief moment where I am standing up in my crib and holding onto the railing. The crib was wood and although it was not terribly well crafted, it had been passed from child to child. I remember the feeling of my hands as they gripped around the form and that there was a quilt at my feet. Any time a child is born in my family, a baby blanket is made and I am standing on the one my aunt gave to me...it was daytime.*

*The next thing I remember lasts only slightly longer and involves me walking across the living room (which was also the bedroom) to embrace my parents. There is a dark colored chest in the corner that was made to hold a record player and would later become my toy box. The floor is concrete and the ceiling is textured. It was cold and I had bare feet. When I reach them I am hugged.*

*My third memory is far more vivid and it took place on a dark rainy night. I am in the back seat of the car, clinging to my sister; we are both scared and crying. We are watching as our mother tries to sneak into the house without waking up our father. She desperately needs to retrieve something, although I'm not aware of what it is. His motorcycle is parked in the grass near the front door.*

*I lived in that house on Shiloh Road until I was in the second grade before we moved into a house on a road that had no name, only a number, which nobody could*



*remember or felt the need to know. The years I spent there were difficult in many ways, however the extent of this is something that I was not aware of until years later.*

*Perhaps because I was the youngest child, my mother and my eldest sister took great care to keep me from knowing, or understanding things as they were playing out. My world was so small. I accepted our lifestyle, to me everything was normal and I was unaware of how thinly things were stretched.*

*When I look through the old photographs, I am unsettled by what I see. My head is full of stories of a small child who was content with what she had and who could simply made up things she didn't have. But the photographs show me a coarse truth. A house falling in, thread bare fabric, cornflakes for dinner, my mother's tired face.*

*When I would visit my father, I would make ballpoint pen drawings on small pads of yellow paper. This is my first memory of making. He had a live-in studio/shop in the basement of a house that was just off the main drag in Bloomington, Indiana. I would go there with one of my older sisters and because there was no yard and also because my father was always working on something to pay his bills, we would have to stay inside. There was only one small window near the door and the space was dark, lit with a network of chicken lights. It was cold in the winter; hot in the summer and in the corner a tiny radio was always playing classical music.*

*My father used small notebooks to sketch out designs for his customers and make important notations. My sister and I would drag stools over to the large work table that consumed the space, climb up onto them and sit next to our father while he did his leatherwork. He would give us each a pen and sheets of paper torn from his pad, and tell*

*us to draw. Each time we finished one he would stop what he was doing and ask us to tell him about the various things we had drawn. He would then write our name and date on the back, and tack the piece of paper up on the wall.*

*My mother, like my father and most of my aunts and uncles, gained her income from making things with her hands. This was difficult when I was a child, as it required her to be constantly working in order to support herself and her three little girls. The area in our home that was meant to have a kitchen table, where a “normal” family would gather and share their meals, was instead filled with my mother’s sewing machines, so we ate sitting on the living room floor.*

*It was almost unheard of for my mother to not be actively doing something at all times. When she did get a break from making things for other people, she made things for her daughters. She grew us our food, made us our bread and chopped the firewood. Everything depended on her ingenuity to carry us through. During the brief moments of luxury, when she had a moment for herself, she would sit down in her old rocking chair. The arms had been crudely repaired several times and were held in place with layers of twine.*

*We didn’t have a television or many toys at all, so my eldest sister was often left with the task of entertaining us. During the winter, we would gather around the woodstove to keep warm and she would read to us while our mother was working. We would wrap ourselves together in quilts and listen to the words, trying to imagine the worlds they were creating – always with the humming rhythm of my mother’s sewing machine, playing the chorus in the background.*

*The stories she read to us become inspiration for drawings. I could remember these stories long after they had been told, and could see images of the characters and the places that they lived in my head. It seemed only natural to put them down on paper. The time spent drawing; was not spent sitting cold on the floor. It was a way to travel somewhere else and experience great and magical things.*

*When it wasn't cold outside, we'd spend our day's outdoors. As on many rural homesteads, the thing that seemed to be in high abundance around us were the bits and pieces of rusted out old junk. There was a ravine out back, behind our house. At some point in time, way back when, someone had decided this would be the appropriate location to dump all the random debris they could not throw on their burn pile. This graveyard of waste had sat for years, seen solely as trash, until my sisters and I stumbled upon it one day.*

*We craved objects and gadgets needed for storytelling and therefore viewed this rusty heap as a real goldmine. Much to my mother's horror and chagrin, we set about hauling all of our treasures up into the yard. We applauded each other whenever a new fantastically desirable piece was discovered for our ever-growing collection of tetanus inducing objects.*

*There was an old camper shell that sat in the weeds off to the side of our driveway. It was propped up on cinder blocks, and therefore the perfect height for small children to use as a sort-of-workbench, which indeed it became. We quickly discovered that by joining our findings together (often with string, mud, or physical force) we could build them into glorious creations, made to suit the ever-changing themes of our imagination. One of our*

*greatest achievements was a magical contraption capable -in our minds, of producing a variety of the sugary beverages that in real life we only rarely had. It was constructed primarily from a chunk of some old machinery. The beauty of it was that if you stuck a running hose in a certain place, the water would spring out from a different chute at the bottom. This resulted, for us, in hours of fun.*

*One summer my second eldest sister got the Chicken Pox and then proceeded to give it to me. I remember this as resulting in a rather wonderful moment. Off in a cool shady spot beneath a persimmon tree, our mother filled up an old metal washtub with water and we both jumped in. Nearby there was a large rose bush that was in full bloom at the time. My sister and I would run over and pluck huge handfuls of petals and add them to the water. We would then jump back in and create any number of worlds, which all revolved around our magical rose petal water. This act was repeated until all of our small red bumps had disappeared.*

*My first encounter with wood, beyond making forts or birdhouses as a child, was the summer that my uncle moved his studio into an old Mayflower moving trailer. It lived halfway reclaimed by nature, next to a field on my family's land. He had been many things but after being trained as a sculptor of stone, somewhere along the way, had switched his material and began working with wood. Wood that came in the form of enormous logs.*

*Indiana summers, consist of painful sunburns and ridiculous humidity. 'We,' by which I mean myself and my fellow siblings would spend our days gathered around my uncle. Enduring the painful conditions of the metal furnace he was working in and trying*

*to be mindful of the rusty nails protruding from the floor - because of course, summer was not a time for shoes.*

*Though he was the sort of person who loved to tell stories and could talk for hours, when his mallet was swinging all you could hear were the echoing rhythms. As a way of appeasing the gaggle of children who appeared day after day, and also most certainly in order to get some work done, he would set us up with glue, scraps of wood, paint, and an endless supply of delightful curly cues that would fly from the end of his gouge.*

*Every so often he would stop what he was doing and come over to applaud us on our own “skillfully” executed mounds of debris and would answer our questions about what he was working on. If we were especially lucky, he would trek us through the field so we could swim in the pond. It was glorious.*

*That August, my uncle’s “studio” needed to be reclaimed as a winter housing unit for the annual hay harvest. This meant he had to move elsewhere. During that time he had completed just one piece and I had witnessed the entirety of its creation. I had seen it transform from a chunk of a tree, into a thing sprung from his mind and pulled out from the wood by his steady hands. For me the result had a tangible history, it was part of my history, and I could never look at the piece without seeing its story.*

## Chapter One

I found myself drawn to the material of wood, because of a sense of “permanence” that my hands could leave on it. Once a cut was made the moment was documented, there was no going back, no erasing. The material will forever remember your actions. This is analogous to how each and every experience we have as individuals affects the next, and how the stories of our lives are written.



*I left Indiana at 1:30 in the morning. I was traveling in a beat up Toyota Camry that my brother assured me would be able to make the seven hundred mile journey, but I had my doubts. I was on a tight schedule, I needed to get to Richmond by a certain time in order to get to the leasing office and retrieve the keys to my new apartment. This meant there would be no allowance for errors in my travel time.*

*I carried with me a laundry basket full of my clothes, a blanket that was given to me by my mother, a framed etching made by a man whom I was leaving behind, a Scarlet*

*Begonia plant from my sister, and my two cats. These were tokens; small things that I hoped would bring me comfort.*

*My first evening was spent siting on the wood floor of an empty apartment, located in a city that was completely unknown to me. My cats were hiding behind the refrigerator (where they stayed for two days) and I was not at all certain that I had made the right choice. It was too late to go back, and more than anything else, I felt alone.*

I had decided to go to grad school because I wanted to understand why it was that I needed to make. My focus during my undergraduate studies had been to master the craft of fine woodworking and it seemed that the time had come where my hands had outgrown that goal. I now had questions about new things that hadn't had a place in my previous making. There were things that I felt I needed to ask and although they were yet not fully clear to me, I came to Richmond in search of their answers.



*Before moving to Richmond, I would watch my five-year-old nephew several days a week. This quickly became part of my routine and it became time preciously spent that I will always hold dear. On many afternoons we would be out in the backyard. He would help me plant Daffodils, and I would help him find Rolly-Polly bugs. He would draw*

*pictures that we would then send to my other nieces and nephews and he would invent games for us to play. These games had rules that were always changing so that he could win.*

*Some days, I would drag him along with me to do my errands, which often included going to the grocery store. He loved pasta of any variety -as long as it had no mushrooms in it and since I had to make him dinner on the days I watched him, we always traveled down that aisle. I found myself in a grocery store in Richmond one day, early in my first semester of graduate studies in this very familiar aisle. It was the morning after my birthday –the first one I had ever spent by myself- and I was staring at pasta sauce, feeling absolutely dreadful. I had called home the prior evening, and my family had gathered around so they could all wish me a happy birthday. All was well until the point where the phone was handed to my nephew, and he asked if he would ever see me again? I spent that evening crying.*



When I got back to the studio, I started making, but I wasn't at all sure what the piece was going to be. I found myself directed by decisions that were based on seemingly random connections to my nephew. I used wood that was the color of pasta sauce, angles that related to a racetrack for his small toy cars, forms and surface adornment that made me



think of our little inside jokes. I didn't bring any of my photo albums with me to Richmond and it seemed that what I was doing was essentially making an object that could serve as a form of portraiture, or the recounting of some moment that was quietly significant.

The next object I made was also directly influenced by events from my life. I was focused on a particular place and time of the year that seemed to be the starting point of a current ailment. I found that when I revisited the memory without the aid of photographs, I would remember it in a very different way. It takes longer to play a timeline in you head then it does to go there in a mere instant, with a photograph.



I spent the first half of my graduate studies realizing, and then coming to terms with the fact that my work comes in an indirect, circuitous route from my experiences. I was making objects that required great lengths of time to fabricate. I used processes that were repetitive and surfaces that needed to be built up slowly and carefully. When fully engaged in bringing these images to life, my mind could travel off and dwell on the aspects of my own life that were troubling me. This submersion in process operated much like my childhood drawings had, except instead of traveling off to far away worlds, I allowed myself to travel deeper into my own. I was homesick, and I missed many things.

The river of feelings flowing in my head, were directing my hands. I often found that when I finished a piece, I was not able to separate it from the memories that I had conjured during its making. The forms, textures, lines, and colors, all seemed to be my way of writing these things down and a way to restate (and reestablish) their importance. I wished to keep my heartfelt emotions as a private matter and to have them remain heavily guarded; so I made sure to write them into my objects using a language that only I could understand.

This started to bother me greatly and to feel wrong. I was not making home décor, but perhaps as I was unwilling to share more with the viewer, this was how my work would at times come across. For years it had been my ultimate goal to prove to myself that I was proficient with the material of wood. To be able to create objects that one would look at and say “well gee, that sure is finely crafted”. Yet as I continued to stumble along to understand my “why-of-making”, it started to become clear that many aspects of a traditional woodworking skillset, which I had worked so hard to gain, were actually getting in the way of the content of my making. The objects I made were a way of working through my heaviest of moments, but the stories were lost to the viewer because they were made in a manner that seemed technical and voided the emotion that I didn’t know how to express otherwise.

## Chapter Two

I have found that some things leave such great impacts upon us that we cannot run from them. It might seem easy when the moment hits, to tuck them away, to shut the door, to pile other things in front, to at all cost avoid the issue -but doing so will inevitably only make the matter snowball and fester. Difficult trails can be seen as blessings, like tears, they mean that you care deeply.



While I was preparing for my candidacy defense last spring, I finally caved in, grabbed hold of the reins and decided that the time had come for me to start sharing. I wasn't concerned with whether or not someone "liked" my work, but it had become of great importance that they understand why it mattered so much to me. This was the central aspect of my making that made me feel the most vulnerable, as it required me to talk intimately about myself.

I didn't know how to begin, or where to begin and it was the afternoon before I had to give my presentation about my work and the progress I had made during my first year of

graduate studies. I had my images in place, that part was simple, the work was already made; it was the oral presentation that was my Achilles' heel.

In an act of sheer desperation, I retraced the paths I'd taken for each of the objects I had made, and wrote down the stories that had generated them. I then (with much quivering in my voice) read them out loud to the review committee the next morning. I found that I could hardly spit out the words, yet knew that it was something that needed to be done.

Once it was all over, I left the room and went outside. I sat down in the sunshine and tried to figure out what had just happened. I felt a sense of deep calm, an internal liberation, and was thoroughly amazed. I had programed myself long ago to lock painful things inside of me but instead found that by releasing them, I could take ownership of them and gain understanding. I wasn't concerned in the least as to whether or not I had passed candidacy, I felt as if I had already won the race.

I spent the summer trying to understand this new development further. The world of language had always been a hurdle for me to jump, it presented conundrum after conundrum to me, and was something that has caused me much grief over the years. It became apparent when I was in the first grade that I was wired slightly differently than the other children. The words on a page were flipped backwards in my head and for years this held me to only the most basic of reading levels. I also could not spell things right because vowels made no sense, nor did much else in the world of words.

I had grown up with a strong aversion for words as they appeared on a page. So I was shocked and surprised to discover that writing had turned itself into an activity that I

not only valued, but excelled at. For some time I had been using my mark making as a form of hieroglyphics that only I could decipher, and yet I found myself also in need of a language that others could understand, and narrative writing seemed to be the key.

I wanted to employ language as a tool to reprocess all the years of experience that played such an important role in making me who I am. I wanted to take ownership of my history and revisit all that had happened. I wished to conjure and confront my childhood, to learn how my beginnings have affected me and brought me to now. I once read somewhere that by the time a person is roughly three years old, all of their personality traits are already programmed and set into place. If this were in fact true, then it would be something that could bring me much sorrow, but would also be something that on the deepest levels I'd understand.



Another important shift in my work has been the integration of pallet wood. This is something unplanned and is the sort of discovered path that I hadn't been seeking. In a sense it could be said, "that the material found me."

*During this past summer my studio mate was moving out (having just graduated) and he had had an old pallet upon which he'd been storing lumber. He left it behind. It seemed somehow like perfect timing, as another peer of mine had just mentioned that she needed a pallet, so I decided to save it from the trash and to give it to her. I hauled it over to my space, and leaned it up against my bench, which is where it sat for the remainder of the summer (it turned out that in the end the person I had gotten it for didn't want it) and for some reason I couldn't just throw it away.*



*It seemed somehow familiar to me, the wood time-weathered, marked with disregard, it looked like "home." I saw both comfort and hardship. The boards reminded me of the things that I knew, of what I had experienced; they worked at conjuring my own story. I often found myself staring at this wood and retracing many old steps along the way.*

*The time came for me to start working on a new piece and my bank account was at a place where I couldn't go out and buy any materials. So I made the decision to cut up my*

*beautiful pallet and use her wood. As I submerged myself in this undertaking, I came to the realization that everything was going to turn out differently than it had in the past. This material had such a remarkable surface on it, it already seemed to be telling me things, and I often had to stop my hands from making marks because I didn't want to cleanse the wood of her history.*



There was also something about the simple fact that I had saved the wood from going to the landfill. I didn't have to pay for any of the material; it was free and could be found in most alleyways. This allowed me to work without the burden of feeling that it was a precious commodity, there were no longer things that I wouldn't let myself do because I didn't want to dishonor the material. I felt that I could make in a manner that was not caught up with the concerns and limitations of traditional fine woodworking.

As I continued working directly with the pallet wood, I became aware of other aspects of its history. The pallets were composed of boards that in actuality are species that are regarded as "high quality" lumber. However by being fated to become pallet wood, our treatment of them is vastly different. If the tree had taken root on a different hilltop, it would have become someone's family heirloom or greatly valued furniture, it would be

“high-end” and the children would not be allowed to touch it. In a different configuration the material would be transformed and treated as a thing of beauty. Instead the wood was placed at the bottom of a hierarchical system, it became disregarded and would likely end up on a burn pile or in the trash.





## Chapter Three

*For the first few months of the girl's life, her mother thought the child might be deaf. This was because she rarely cried; she seemed content watching others without engaging with them at all and she slept for long hours submerged in her own world. Her mother often tested her hearing loss theory by clanging cast iron pans together, by clapping her hands and by making sudden loud noises to gauge if the child would react.*

*There was nothing wrong with the girl's ears, if anything, the problem was that she heard what was going on around her all too clearly. She chose to not make noise and to not disrupt as she had recognized that people already had enough on their plates. She kept herself still and quiet and said that everything was fine. The child did not want to add weight to the burden.*

*As she grew, this personality trait snowballed. It was the factor that constantly dictated how she would interact with her world. The girl kept herself locked up inside. She stashed her moments in boxes and created many locked doors to conceal them. She was a squirrel hiding the nuts from others, waiting for the day when they might be needed.*

*This became a fortress strapped to her back, a massive structure where her shadows lived. It was something that was always present, but nearly impossible to see. It was too unwieldy and too tangled for her to know how to even enter it and so she simply chose to continue adding to its girth. The years slowly passed.*

*One day, the very weight of the fortress caused the girl to crumble. She had tried to place a part of herself onto this heap, but it was the straw that broke the camel's back and she collapsed to the ground. She lay there staring up at the thing she had created, it had become a parasite that was beginning to eat her alive. A change was desperately needed.*

*She found a pry bar and started to attack the doors. Many of them refused to budge, but she did begin to find ones that would start to give way. What had been so well hidden inside now led her deep down a path where the shadows began to give way to light. She found an entryway where she could access the inner places that she had constructed; it opened up and allowed her to walk through.*

*She came upon a form that no longer provided protection. Her eyes traced the structure and she found that it responded to her movements, it was changing as she traveled through the space. This thing breathed when she did and she realized that this was because it was a thing that she had created and that it was a part of herself.*

*There were fragmented silhouettes from all of the collected years; it was filled with broken outlines that were twisted and mangled and in need of much repair. These pieces housed all the moments that she had placed inside; this was where she had been "storing the nuts". She could look into these nesting boxes and retrieve the eggs, find the plunder, retrace her path.*

*The floodgates were opened and the tears finally flowed unimpeded. She felt the wounds begin to heal. They would still leave scars, but would have stopped oozing and would finally disappear. All the small things were allowed their importance; it was OK*

*that they mattered and that the action had moved past the fear of being selfish. A burden had been lifted.*

*Not all of the doorways were open, parts remained shuttered and locked behind slabs still too heavy to dislodge. She had a sense of what might be tucked away inside; she had an idea of what the secrets might be and she made a deal with herself that their contents would stay undisturbed until a much later chapter...*





The work in my thesis show *Chapter Three* is the physical form of the previous piece of writing. It is my way of sorting out the words and telling my story. It is how I choose to realize, confront and tackle the events that are ingrained in my structure.

In the past my work had always been completed in the studio, my eyes and hands would know what every inch of it looked like, how it felt, what the best angles were. When it would come time to install a piece, I could simply set it down in the space and perhaps give it a light turn. The control of knowing ahead of time exactly what the viewer would be viewing had been important to me. I needed to be sure of what I was showing and give myself time to edit parts out if I felt I was showing too much.

I wanted my thesis work to be a challenge and so I decided to confront what would be the most difficult element of making and address my control issues. For a while I had recognized a need for my work to step past some of the traditional skillsets that I had programed into my making and felt that the work in this show would have to take that risk, which seemed terribly frightening to me.

I remembered the feeling of being a child and spending my days running about the yard and through the woods. I remembered gathering old boards and bundles of sticks and how I would then shape them into lopsided forts and places to play. There was something fulfilling about making a thing with the debris that you could gain from foraging about your land, the simple idea of using limited resources, a set number of materials and making them into something else.

It had always given me a sense of accomplishment when I was a little girl, a sense of pride and there was always such joy in making. I had felt that I was doing what needed to be done, there was no editing, no fear, no outside influences, the making came from me. I wanted to regain this feeling, this freedom with my work and so I chose to make my thesis show in a similar manner.

The work is made from slightly over 100 reclaimed pallets. I gathered them by driving around town in a van and scanning for piles that looked unwanted. I would then pull over, figure out where to enter the building they were sitting next to and simply ask if I could have them. I was often greeted with looks of confusion; people at times thought I was crazy and they also told me no – this happened on quite a few occasions. However I had to have pallets, I needed their age, their travels; their weathered surface -it simply cannot be faked. So I kept searching until I found locations that allowed me to have their pallets and then I joyously loaded them into the van and drove off smiling. Each time I got more it felt like Christmas morning.

Next I brought them into the studio and set about breaking them down and turning them into large piles of cross slats. This task was not nearly as simple as it may sound, pallets are built surprisingly well –often with threaded nails that are engendered to stay where they are placed. So I devised monotonous routines and tricks that allowed me to pluck the precious fruit off the vine. The boards were then re-sawn, cut into different proportions, or sometimes left unaltered.

I realized that I wanted the work to be large, that it needed to be of a scale that was out of my comfort zone and that this meant the piece would have to be constructed in the

gallery space. This also meant that leading up to my install, I could only build small parts and pieces ahead of time –components that could be carried up the narrow staircase I had to travel to get to my room in the gallery. Before I got into the space, all I had were piles of material.

I made the work by first erecting a basic wall structure, I wanted to make sure (because it was going to be so large) that it would be structurally sound and not fall over onto an innocent bystander. Once it was in place, I turned on the air compressor, grabbed the brad nailer and started to make. I didn't have a clear "end point" in mind and I didn't know what the outcome was going to be. The only cold fact was that I had a set amount of material to work with and a firm time limit. This seemed similar to being a child and needing to finish before you lost the light of day, or before your mother would start calling out that it was dinnertime.

The work is held together with close to 20,000 brad nails and there was rhythm in its making. The sound of the nails flying out of the gun and the hum of the air compressor kicking on provided a steady backbeat that my body got in step with. The making process was physical but also seemed to flow out of me. Pick up the board, place it, nail it, pick up the board, place it, nail it – if you use the right cadence it becomes a song.

The actual making of the work did not seem difficult, the things I make have always had some monotonous component in their creation and I enjoy manual labor. But there were many mental hurdles leading up to it and bridges that I had to cross. I had to let go of things, loosen my grip and also find internal faith. I had to give up control and found that in doing so, I gained control back.

At the end of the show, when I have to de-install, my piece will be completely torn apart. It will return to being mere bundles and piles of material. This feels strangely thrilling, it seems like childhood freedom. There will be endless possibilities, it can be remade over and over and will always have a different outcome. There will be no fear of “making it wrong” because if you don’t like something about it, well then tomorrow you can always just go out and do it again



**Education**

2013    MFA Virginia **Commonwealth University School of the Arts**, Richmond, VA.

Craft/Material Studies, Focus in Wood

2008    BFA **Herron School of Art and Design** Indianapolis, IN.

Furniture Design and Woodworking

**Awards**

2013    **Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation Assistantship**

Virginia Commonwealth University

2012    **Pollak Society Award**

Virginia Commonwealth University

**Graduate Teaching Assistantship**

Virginia Commonwealth University

2008    **Furniture Department Student Achievement Scholarship**

Herron School of Art and Design

2007    **Furniture Department Student Achievement Scholarship**

Herron School of Art and Design

## **Exhibitions**

2013      *Chapter Three*

Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA

*SPLACE*

FAB gallery, VCU Fine Arts Building, Richmond, VA

2012      *Pause*

True F. Luck gallery, The Visual Arts Center, Richmond, VA.

2009      *Family Heirlooms*

Art Post gallery, South Bend, IN.

2007      *Against the Grain*

Marsh Gallery, Herron School of Art and Design, Indianapolis, IN